

EPA begins talks with CFAC

By **CHRIS PETERSON** Hungry Horse News | **Posted: Wednesday, June 17, 2015 7:56 am**

More details emerged last week on the cleanup of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. plant. The Environmental Protection Agency on June 10 sent the company and former owner ARCO a draft administrative order on consent. The order is a legal agreement signed by the EPA, ARCO and CFAC that sets required corrective or cleanup actions for the plant. In short, it's a contract between the EPA and the companies, noted Michael Cirian, an environmental engineer for the EPA.

Cirian attended a meeting last week of the community liaison panel as a guest. The panel, which is made up of private individuals, local elected officials and other government entities, was formed last month. The panel heard an outline of the company's current cleanup schedule by Drew Baris of Roux Associates, which will oversee the environmental cleanup of the site.

One of the first steps is to identify chemicals of potential concern. In this case, that includes cyanide, herbicides and pesticides, heavy metals and PCBs among other potential contaminants.

Roux has plans to do 126 soil borings and will drill 43 new monitoring wells in addition to 25 existing monitoring wells. They'll also study the groundwater and surface water interactions over the course of at least a year. If the company schedule is maintained, a feasibility study of cleanup would be finished by 2019, but Baris cautioned that timeline could change as regulatory agencies are involved.

The site is a candidate for Superfund listing.

The cleanup timetable brought questions from the panel.

"We know some areas are contaminated for sure," County Commissioner Phil Mitchell said. "Are you going to wait 4 1/2 years to do something about those?"

Baris didn't have a direct answer to the question, but he noted as cleanups go, it was a fairly aggressive schedule. The main area of concern to date has been groundwater contamination of cyanide on wells located at the plant. No private residential wells have tested positive for the poison.

Panel member Lyle Mitchell worried about the stigma of a Superfund listing and wondered if the company could clean it up under Superfund guidelines without an actual listing.

Others wondered about the transparency of the meetings. No media outlets were directly invited to the meeting and the same went for the general public.

The Hungry Horse News learned about the meeting from panel members. Moderator Mary Green of Ann Green Communications, a public relations company based in South Charleston, W.Va., promised that would change and the meetings are, in fact, open to the public.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 9 at 6 p.m. at the North Valley Teakettle Community Building on Nucleus Avenue.